

L'Appartement and *Wicker Park*: Transculture and The Remake¹

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Introduction

Film draws upon a vast archive of traditions of pictorial and aural representations as well as traditions of storytelling across all cultures. All films are to a greater or lesser degree intertextual² and the language of film is about the circulation of ideas, images, and sounds. It is a vast system of exchange and mutual dependence.³ My paper will look at these exchanges in terms of patterns of transculture. The remake is an ideal example of this circulation. Since 1931, Hollywood has remade 79 French films, the largest body of films. As can be seen the history of the remake over the past eighty years shows that there is a marked preference for popular films, for comedies (28) and dramedies or light dramas (15), rather than *auteur* films. Yet some films, such as Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962) remade as *Twelve Monkeys* (1995) by Terry Gilliam, or *Mortelle randonnée* (1983), Claude Miller's youthful film remade in 1999 as *Eye of the Beholder* by Stephan Elliott, are not popular films. More cult film than simple science fiction or thriller, these films owe their remakes to the passion of screenwriters David and Janet Peoples in the first case and in the latter to Elliott who also wrote the screenplay.

The retelling reveals a process of adaptation of the original plot to local cultural conditions. In Hollywood's case, remaking a French film means first and foremost transforming it into an American cultural object that may be understood by audiences around the world.⁴

¹ The table and charts are the author's own work.

The different scale of shots referred to in the charts are: ECU, Extreme Close Up; CU, Close Up; MCU, Medium Close Up; MS, Medium Shot; WS, Wide Shot.

² Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes* (Paris: Le Seuil, Collection Points, 1982).

³ Jacqueline Nacache, 'Comment penser les remakes américains?', *Positif*, vol. 460 (1999), pp. 76–80.

Joseph D. Straubhaar, 'Beyond Media Imperialism: Asymmetrical Interdependence and Cultural Proximity', *Cultural Studies in Mass Communications*, vol. 8 (1991), pp. 39–59.

⁴ Sources for Table 1:

http://www.allocine.fr/tags/default_gen_tag=Film+fran%E7ais+%E0+1%27origine+d%27un+remake+am%E9ricain&filtre=film&tri=&page=1.html/. Accessed 19/06/10. And Raphaëlle Moine, *Remakes; les films français à Hollywood* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2007), pp.193–198.

Table 1: French films remade by Hollywood by genre

GENRE	COMEDY	DRAMEDY	DRAMA	THRILLER	OTHER	UNIDENTIFIED	TOTAL
1931-1939	3	3	4	2	2	3	17
1940-1949		1	1			1	3
1950-1959	-	3	2	3		1	9
1960-1969	1	1	3		1		6
1970-1979	8	2	-	-	-		10
1980-1989	7	2	4	2	1		16
1990-1999	7	2	-	1	2		12
2000-2008	3	1	-	2	1		6
TOTAL	28	15	14	10	7	5	79

From the very beginning, Hollywood had to make films for a cosmopolitan, multicultural audience, unlike the French and other European nations whose films needed only to appeal to a monocultural, domestic audience. Indeed the success of Hollywood, and its worldwide economic dominance, is in no small part due to the nature of the American market. Francis Veber (*La cage aux folles*, *Birdcage*; *Le diner de cons*, *The Dinner Game*), the Hollywood-based French screenwriter and director, explains the success of the remakes of his films by the universality of his stories.

Unlike multiculturalism,⁵ or cultural diversity, which has been shown to re-enforce boundaries based on past cultural heritages and identities, transculture is a transient and open system.

Transculture dissolves these rigid, naturalized features of culture and gives semantic flexibility and new compatibility to elements of different cultures. Transculture is the next level of liberation, this time from unconscious symbolic dependencies, predispositions and prejudices of the “native culture.”⁶

Mikhail Epstein goes on to give this simple example:

⁵ Donald Cuccioletta, ‘Multiculturalism or Transculturalism: Towards a Cosmopolitan Citizenship’, *London Journal of Canadian Studies* 2001/2002, vol. 17 (2002), pp.1–11.

⁶ Mikhail Epstein, ‘Transculture’, *International Society for Universal Dialogue — Glossary* at <http://glossary.isud.org/2007/11/transculture.html/>. Accessed 19/06/10.

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The same rice tastes differently to a Chinese in a medieval village than to a Frenchman in modern Paris, because rice after wine and cheese or *fois gras* is something completely different from rice after rice after rice. As a transcultural being, I make my own choice as to which culinary, artistic or religious tradition to join, and to what degree I make it my own.⁷

Transculture is the circulation of cultures across boundaries, national, cultural, and personal. In the process of circulation, meaning changes with each audience as context changes and each individual or group brings different perspectives to the reading of the cultural text.

As with other cultural products, the audience's understanding of a film is affected by cultural difference, as well as variations in knowledge, expectations and modes of perception. Understanding is shaped by patterns of experience, prejudices and predispositions developed over the years. As films cross borders, they are read in a different way. Some connotations are lost while new meanings appear. Making a film is like weaving a cloth. Reading a film is like unravelling that weaving process and involves identifying the mutual dependence between films and what those transcultural threads are and why, in the case of the remake, these threads do not operate systematically both ways. What is significant is not "that the idea was borrowed but how it is then utilised and drawn upon in the resultant cultural text."⁸

My analysis of the remake as transcultural object will focus on *L'Appartement* (Mimouni, 1996) and its Hollywood remake, *Wicker Park* (McGuigan, 2004) as they present particularly good examples of the cultural threads that weave the remake. In this paper I will identify these threads first by examining the plot, then by analysing the construction of the same sequence in each film. I have charted the number, length, and scale of shots used, to identify the transcultural flows, inspired by Barry Salt's⁹ approach to the stylistic analysis of a film by systematic deconstruction, which he calls 'cinemetrics'. Although cinema itself is a transnational cultural object (the financing, production team, filming locations, and distribution networks, in fact every aspect of a film's journey from concept to the screen is now a multinational enterprise), my concern here is to use the actual construction of the film and its narrative style to identify transcultural patterns.

⁷ Epstein, 'Transculture'.

⁸ Chris Berry, 'What's Big about the Big Film?' in *Movie Blockbusters*, ed. Julian Stringer (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 218.

⁹ Barry Salt, 'Cinemetrics' at <http://www.cinemetrics.lv/salt.php/>. Accessed 19/06/10

The Plot

The interpretation of the plot of a film and its narration will always differ depending on the age, gender, education, and culture of the viewer. To attract an audience to a film, whether in the cinema or in the home, the producers must find an interpretation most likely to appeal to the target audience. Cultural groups gravitate towards the familiar and recast the new into known moulds in order to absorb it. So that in the case of the remake, *Wicker Park* has been reshaped to correspond to familiar and respected patterns of storytelling and characterisation. It is interesting to note that *L'Appartement* was not released on DVD in English-speaking countries until 2008, whereas the remake, *Wicker Park*, came out on DVD within two years of its theatrical release. The English-speaking viewer, then, would have had access to *Wicker Park* before *L'Appartement*.

Even before viewing the two films, the plot summaries on the DVD jackets point to differences in interpretation. *L'Appartement*, which was screenwriter, Gilles Mimouni's first film as director, is presented as already transcultural. The text on the jacket states:

L'Appartement is a fanciful and romantic tale of love and obsession. A blend of Gallic romanticism and Hitchcockian style, this film is a delicious pastiche of five people's passions and lives... Mimouni makes the most of its deliriously romantic setting whilst effortlessly unravelling an intricate and unpredictable plot which carefully ties its lovelorn characters up in knots as it races along to a heady conclusion.¹⁰

On the other hand, *Wicker Park* is presented as an original home-grown film with no trace of transcultural fibre. Loss of the intertextual references present in the original film can already be seen as a transcultural weaving. The text on the jacket of the DVD of *Wicker Park* reads: "Enter the torrid and treacherous world of *Wicker Park*, where deception and seduction walk hand in hand. Starring an outstanding cast of Hollywood's hottest young stars, including Josh Hartnett (*Pearl Harbour*), Rose Byrne (*Troy*), Matthew Lillard (*Scream*) and Diane Kruger (*Troy*), *Wicker Park* is a sizzling, action-packed noir thriller that will leave you breathless."¹¹ Notice the *hubris*, and sexual connotation, of the vocabulary: 'a torrid and treacherous world', 'deception and seduction', 'outstanding' cast, 'hottest' young stars, 'sizzling', 'action-packed noir thriller', 'breathless', and on the front of the jacket the description,

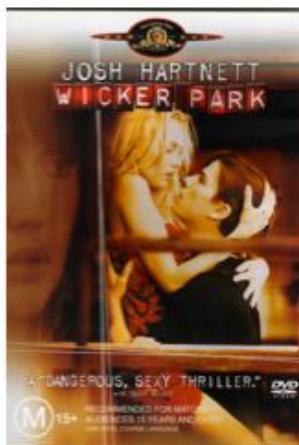
¹⁰ *L'Appartement*, dir. Gilles Mimouni (France: Cinemien, 1995), DVD release by Universal, 2008. French-Italian- Spanish coproduction.

¹¹ *Wicker Park*, dir. Paul McGuigan (USA: MGM, 2004), DVD release by Twentieth Century Fox in 2006.

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'a dangerous, sexy thriller'. These different expectations are carried through into the images on the DVD covers as can be seen below.

DVD covers



Comparison of the plot of the two films shows how the chronology of events is mixed up, and scattered across the whole film. The audience gradually pieces together the sequence of events that take place over five days and four nights with flashback to events that occurred two years previously. While the audience is plunged into Max/Matt's love story with Lisa two years ago right from Day One, it must wait until Day Four — and virtually one hour into the film, or more than half way — to begin to understand why Alice/Alex is so intent on keeping Max/Matt from seeing Lisa again. In *L'Appartement* the audience must work hard at reconstituting the chronology of events and has to wait until the end of the film for all the knots to be untied. In *Wicker Park*, there is less ambiguity of character and less developed subplots to hamper the audience's involvement in the film.

Charts 1 and 2 show the differences in distribution of these temporal shifts. The vertical axis shows the duration in minutes of each timeframe and the horizontal axis shows when these temporal shifts occur over the five days. I have labelled them as: 'Present', for events that occur during the day and night, the here and now, of the film; 'Flashback', for Max's love story with Lisa;

'Backstory 1', for Alex's story; and 'Backstory 2-P', for the events immediately preceding the scene in the restaurant at the beginning of the film.

While the events that occur in the present are allocated approximately the same amount of screen time in both films, in *L'Appartement*, past events are distributed differently. There is no temporal shift on Day Two and Day Five includes a final short flashback that completes the story. The arrangement of the chronology of the story is also more mixed up. In *Wicker Park* each day includes a flashback or backstory, and it divulges more to the viewer in the flashbacks on Day One, guided by a concern to be as easily understandable as possible. However, overall, the two films are similar in their treatment of the main plot. While both films are the same length (112 and 111 minutes respectively), the remake contains many more shots than the French version, as can be seen in the sequence analysis below in Chart 3 through to Chart 6. Different approaches to story telling reveal differences in worldview and aesthetics as well as different transcultural patterns.

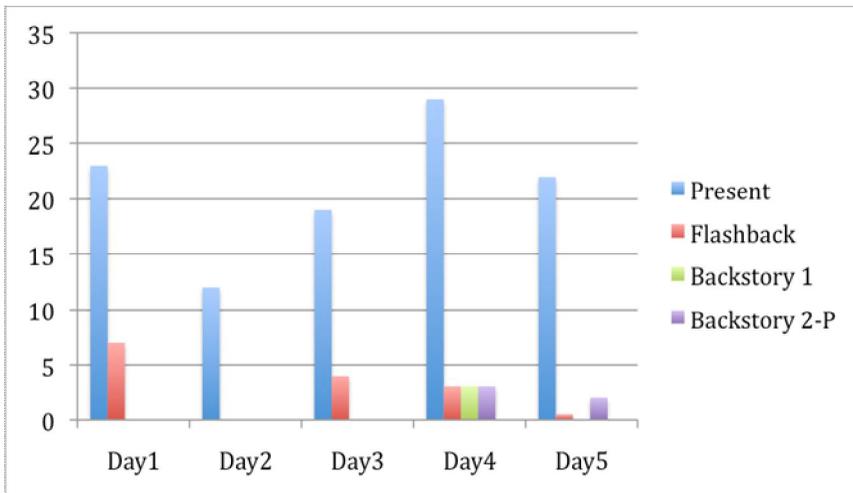


Chart 1. *L'Appartement* — distribution and duration of temporal shifts, expressed in minutes

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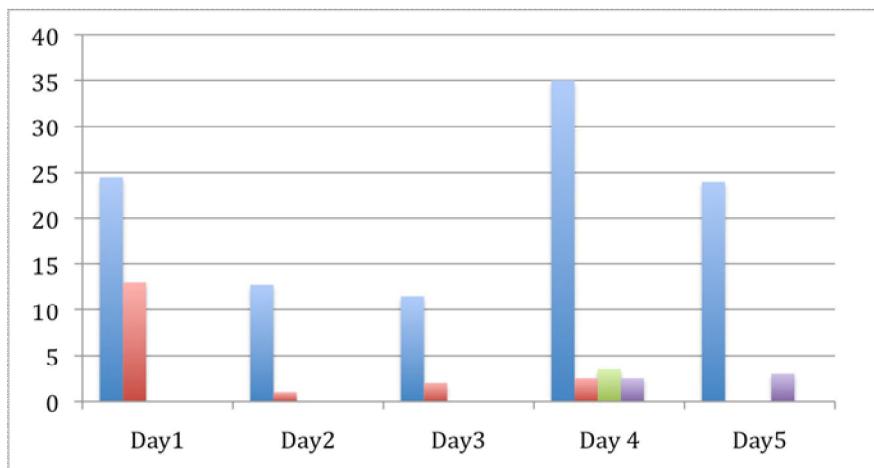


Chart 2. *Wicker Park* — distribution and duration of temporal shifts, expressed in minutes

L'Appartement is constructed on the interplay between the knowledge the audience is given and that which Max holds at any one point of the story. The protagonists are like puppets manipulated by Alice and the director of the film. Because the remake in the end is more a romance than a thriller, despite its makers, *Wicker Park* does not have the same intensity nor the feeling that the director is pulling the strings. Both films switch between time, women and locations to unravel the intricate plot, but only *L'Appartement* plays tantalisingly with audience expectations. The French film also requires the audience to engage intellectually, not simply to be entertained. The director is offering the audience different patterns or layers of meaning and intellectual pleasure. The American version on the other hand offers straightforward and immediate first-degree pleasure.

Narrative Structure

The sequence I will now analyse occurs just over 21 minutes into *L'Appartement* and 23 minutes into *Wicker Park*, during the first night and morning of Day Two and lasts 2min. 16 and 1min. 06 respectively. It is the latter part of the second flashback of the film and comprises two scenes, which I refer to as the sex scene and the hotel room. I have chosen these two sequences because they exemplify two different approaches to weaving the same story and, in the process, reveal their transcultural patterning.

The sex scene

In *L'Appartement*, Max climbs stairs up to Lisa's apartment, hesitates at the door, then finally rings once and knocks. Lisa opens. They embrace as they move into the apartment. Before the door is even kicked closed Lisa has bared Max to the waist in one single gesture, which is gently comical. The music playing is a leisurely tune that overlaps from the previous two scenes, dissolving into a discreet twittering of birds, and only stops as the scene ends the next morning.

In *Wicker Park*, on the other hand, Matt climbs stairs up to Lisa's with the same music as in previous shot playing loudly. He hesitates at the door, rings, and Lisa's outstretched arm pulls Matt into the apartment. The sex scene that follows is more passionate and explicit than in the French version and is overlaid with the same loud-beat, revved up music playing as when Matt reversed the car into shot at the beginning. The music has built up the excitement to this scene as the climax whereas in *L'Appartement* the music is almost anecdotal to the whole sequence. At no point should the audience risk being disorientated or not understand what is happening.

In keeping with classic Hollywood filmmaking, transition from one scene to another is usually signalled clearly to the audience to avoid any confusion. In *Wicker Park*, the introduction to the sex scene as a flashback is carefully signalled in a number of ways to avoid confusing the audience: close up on Matt's face; Matt rubbing his eyes; Rebecca's voice over telling Matt to take one tablet to help him sleep on the flight; and Matt changing positions on the bed. Yet, any of these devices would be sufficient to indicate that the character is falling asleep and about to dream. The end of the flashback is similarly signalled by showing the couple in bed in Lisa's apartment (the pillow cases are embroidered with a floral motif whereas those at the hotel are plain) followed by a fade to black. The two shot is a zoom out as the knock on the hotel room door is heard.

The striking difference in the portrayal of the scene lies in the choice of shots and their length as can be seen in Charts Three and Four. This choice exemplifies two radically different aesthetics. In *L'Appartement*, Mimouni has summarised or evoked the action whereas In *Wicker Park*, McGuigan has 'covered' the scene to re-create the illusion of a continuous action in space and time.¹² The shots are more numerous and their scale more varied than in the French film, and most of the shots are close ups and extreme close ups that last one second or less. The film relies on fast cutting of very short shots to convey the passion of the characters, not the content of the shot themselves.

¹² David Bordwell, 'Intensified Continuity: Visual Style in Contemporary American Film', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 55, no.3 (2002), pp.16–28.

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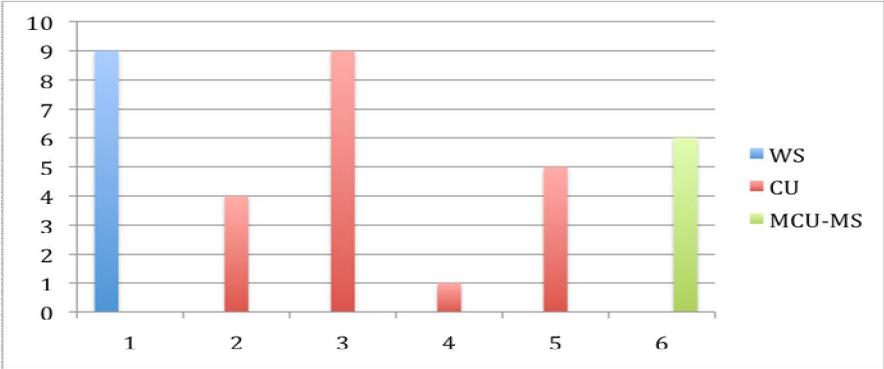


Chart 3. *L'Appartement*: Sex scene — Length and scale of shots, expressed in seconds on vertical axis and shot numbers 1-6 on horizontal axis.

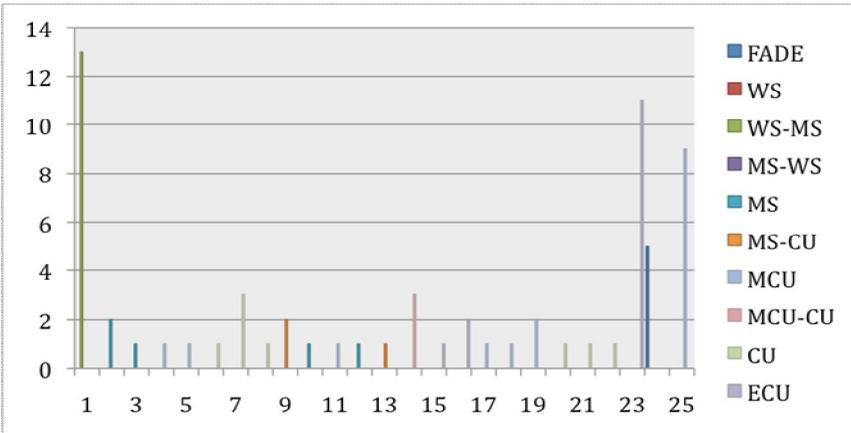


Chart 4. *Wicker Park*: Sex scene — Length and scale of shots, expressed in seconds and shot numbers from 1–25 on horizontal axis.

Only one shot lasts one second. All the other shots vary between four seconds and nine seconds. These are long shots compared to the length of the shots in the scene in *Wicker Park*, which needs twenty-five shots over 66 seconds to reconstitute a logical depiction of the action: passionate sex between Matt and Lisa. Indeed the films target different audiences and use different devices to move them. All films aim to move their audience. How they do so is what distinguishes *L'Appartement* from *Wicker Park*. The American remake produces emotional involvement by creating greater identification with the main characters and techniques, such as the sound treatment, that guide audience reaction. *L'Appartement*, on the other hand, relies on unsettling shot

transitions to keep the audience involved and constantly working out what is happening. The audience is intellectually engaged and emotionally involved.

The hotel room scene

The second scene I want to examine is really a sequence with parallel action in *L'Appartement*, but is a scene in *Wicker Park*. The shot scale and duration expressed in seconds are shown in Charts 5 and 6.

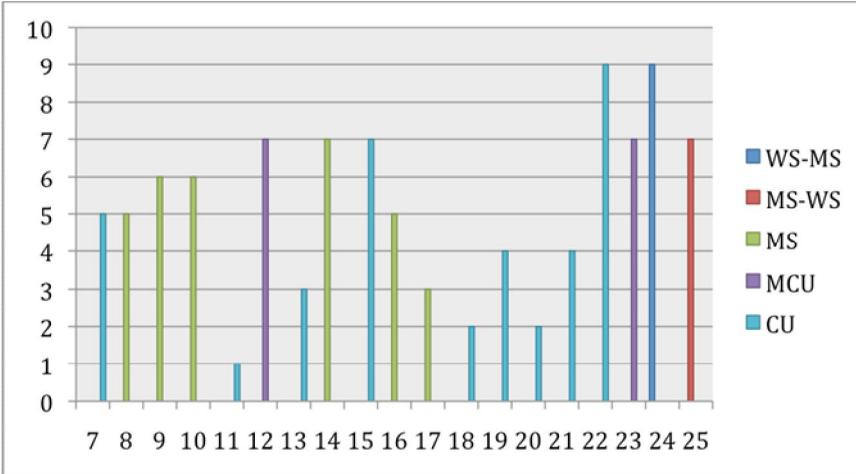


Chart 5. *L'Appartement*: Hotel room sequence — shot scale and length expressed in seconds. Shot numbers carry on from the sex scene.

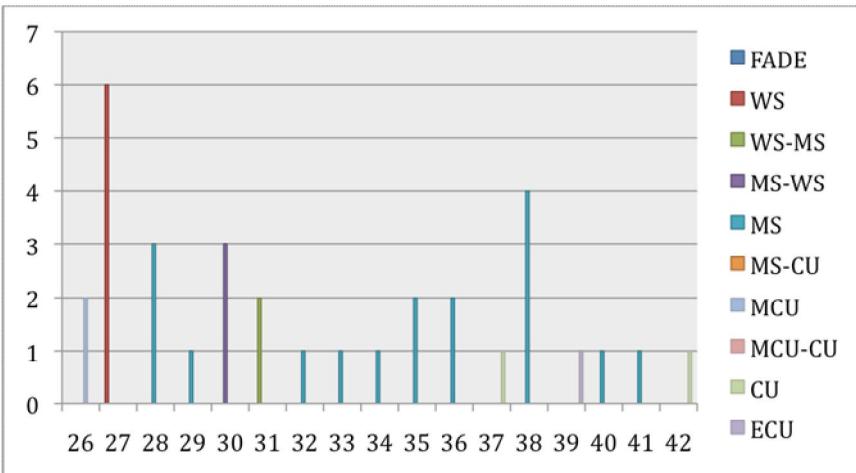


Chart 6. *Wicker Park*: Hotel room scene; shot scale and length expressed in seconds. Shot numbers carry on from the sex scene.

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In *L'Appartement*, the scene in the hotel room the following morning recalls *North by Northwest* (Hitchcock, 1959). It is an unmistakable reference for anyone who knows Hitchcock films. But the treatment is completely different. Here the tension comes from the hotel staff who come marching up to confront Max. Apart from the structuring of space, Mimouni is also influenced by Hitchcock's approach to structuring time, and the difference between screen time and story time.

In order to create dramatic tension, Mimouni stretches and expands the time Max takes to put the pieces of the torn newspaper cutting together again. He even takes time to read the article. The contrast between the pace of events inside the room and outside is diametrically opposed, producing one of those thrilling 'clock ticking' moments. Inside the room the pace is almost leisurely whereas outside, the pace is rushed as the hotel manager and his two acolytes hurry to the room. The sequence is played out in nineteen shots of various lengths ranging from the close up and medium shot to a couple of wide shots. The news item scene runs for 1 minute 15 seconds, and eight shots, out of a total of 1 minute and 47 seconds, for the whole sequence. The interplay between the two paces is Hitchcockian and creates both tension and comedy.

In *Wicker Park*, Matt wakes up to the knock on the door, he gets up and goes to peep through the spy-hole in the door and we get a fish eye view of the chamber maid returning the dry-cleaning. Matt is in a hurry to leave the room. He hastily puts jacket and coat on, straps on his two bags and, noticing the torn pieces of the newspaper article in the ashtray, shoves them into his pocket before leaving. Matt does not forget to pick up the compact either, not shown in the French version. The scene is covered in forty seconds (seventeen shots). Thus the news item is shot very quickly; there is no playing with story time and filmic time. The news item is handled in half the number of shots (four) in *L'Appartement* and lasts just 11 seconds, considerably less than the original 1min.15sec.

In classical Hollywood cinema, Bordwell tells us, space was used to orientate the audience and support the narrative logic of the film.¹³ This was founded on photographic realism, privileging depth of field, linear perspective and central positioning in the frame. Since the introduction of digital technology,¹⁴ many films now emphasise the graphic qualities of the flat screen, using multiple screens, layering the images and playing with the size of the screen and the focus of the action. This is true of *Wicker Park* in which

¹³ David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (London: Routledge, 1985).

¹⁴ Eleftheria Thanouli, 'Narration in World Cinema: Mapping the Flows of Formal Exchange in the Era of Globalisation', *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2008), pp. 5–15.

instances of split screens and layered images abound, while still complying with the conventions of continuity editing, based on cause and effect.

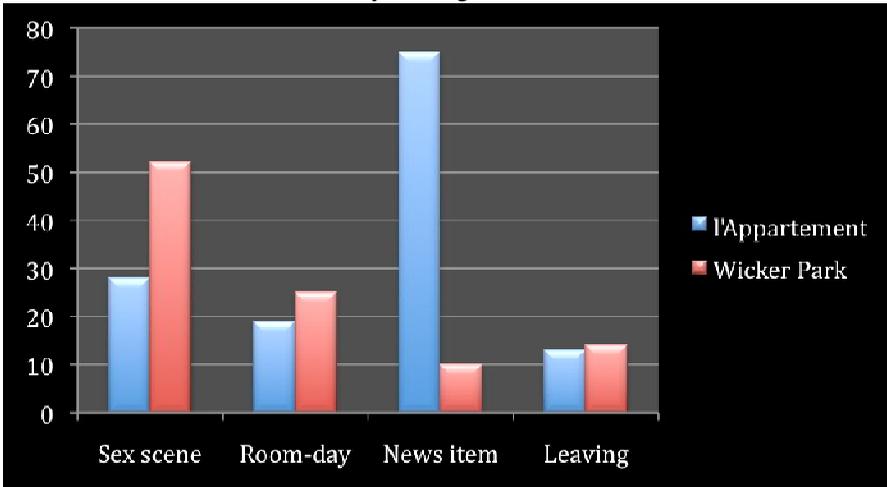


Chart 7. Comparison of screen time (shown in seconds on vertical axis) allocated to each event in the hotel sequence in *L'Appartement* and *Wicker Park*

The comparison between the two films in Chart 7, recapitulates the amount of screen time each film gives to each aspect of the plot in the sequence selected for close analysis. It shows how each director has interpreted the plot and constructed the narrative. Mimouni's temporal expansion in representing Max finding the torn news cutting in the ashtray in the hotel room clearly shows its function as the conduit to finding Lisa as well as the importance of the subplot of Daniel. *Wicker Park* instead emphasises the romance between the main characters, Lisa and Matt. What this chart does not show is how different the handling of Max/Matt leaving the hotel room the next morning is. However, it does show that like Hitchcock, Mimouni believes in the added value of subplots.

***L'Appartement* and Intertextuality as Transculture**

All these different ways of constructing the narrative tell us that *L'Appartement* exemplifies Genette's concept of intertextuality. If, however, the intertextuality is sufficiently rich and forms patterns of meaning we can then talk more appropriately of transcultural weaving. Neither copy, nor remake of any one Hitchcock film, *L'Appartement*, nevertheless, resonates with themes, plot details, and narrative techniques for which Hitchcock is famous.¹⁵ Neither is

¹⁵ See for example, Bill Krohn, *Hitchcock at Work* (London: Phaidon, 2003).

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there a single scene that copies or quotes precisely Hitchcock. It is more as if the film was suffused with references to a number of Hitchcock films. The hotel scene in *L'Appartement* is not the same scene as in *North by Northwest*. Yet it is unmistakably a reference.

In other respects Mimouni reworks Hitchcock's plot ideas, such as the lighter dropped into a drain in *Strangers on a Train* (1951), which in *L'Appartement* becomes the key to Lisa's apartment. Both men struggle hard to retrieve it while the sequence is intercut with another subplot. The spying on the lives of others recalls *Rear Window* (1954). Mimouni must be a Hollywood fan, even Billy Wilder's 1960 comedy-drama, *The Apartment*, is referenced in the use of a compact the mirror of which gets broken and now reflects a fractured image of the viewer. There is a rich array of references that are all fully integrated into the narrative structure of the film.

The music and pace of the camera movements are also very Hitchcockian. *L'Appartement* is a transcultural text dripping with intertextuality, and designed for the enjoyment of a cinephile audience. However, *L'Appartement* can still be understood and enjoyed without knowing Hitchcock's work. Recognising Mimouni's debt to Hitchcock though, does add an extra layer of meaning to the reading of the film. The narrative logic in *L'Appartement*, is systematically challenged and disrupted by a typically Hitchcockian editing and mise-en-scène strategy designed to disorient the audience, lead it momentarily down the wrong track, generally play with audience expectations, and control the knowledge it is allowed to acquire at any one point. Indeed, the audience is often being misled by the first part of a scene and has to constantly rectify its reading of the film as the scene unfolds.

This momentary disorientation is achieved in several ways. For instance, the tracking shot out of Lisa's apartment (at 55min), focused on the ceiling, dissolves into a tracking shot of the floor in the corridor leading to the phone cabin at La Pergola (at 57min.). This is a seamless transition from the present to the immediate past. The cut is a visual match but it is disorientating. The audience must wait a moment before identifying where the story has moved to and what timeframe the film has now taken the audience to.

Mimouni is not only using the same montage approach to filmmaking as Hitchcock, he is also following Eisenstein's montage theory, in which the juxtaposition of spatially or temporally incoherent shots to express an idea, is the heart of creation. Hitchcock, a British director who migrated to Hollywood, 'Americanised' montage by applying it to a particular genre, the thriller, which Mimouni in turn has picked up. Intertextuality, then, has become more complex and is better described as another example of transcultural flow. It is not simply a matter of identifying references to previous texts. To identify *L'Appartement* as an example of transculture is to recognise that Hitchcock's

body of work and his interpretation of Hollywood and American culture influence the film. Transculture is an extension of intertextuality into a systematic and coherent pattern of references, yet still an open system. Loss of intertextuality in *Wicker Park* is in some ways a loss of the transcultural. Yet by adapting the French film to a contemporary American audience, *Wicker Park* brings to the story a set of different threads to weave a different transcultural interpretation. Paradoxically, one transcultural thread replaces another, but there is always a pattern of transculture to be found in a new cloth.

***Wicker Park* and Adaptation as Transculture**

“Borrowing and translating are only the first step on the road toward agency and creativity”.¹⁶

Adaptation is finding an equivalent situation or context to translate the original that corresponds to the social conditions of the culture the work is being translated into. The original plot was a challenge. The hero stalks the woman he has fallen in love with. Two years later he steals the key to her apartment and hides waiting for her return. But, he is there to save the fake Lisa, i.e. Alice, the usurper, from jumping out of the window and committing suicide. Alice in fact also spied on the two lovers two years earlier and she sets in motion the game of deception and betrayal that is the film. In a subplot, the heroine's newly jilted lover, Daniel, sets fire to her apartment burning her to death in the process.

In the audio commentary featuring on the DVD of *Wicker Park*, McGuigan talks about how he and the writer found the French story too threatening for an American audience. In the adaptation, the stalking element of the original plot was dropped, as was the suicide. The subplot of Daniel is so diminished as to make his role in the film confusing, if not incomprehensible. The themes of burning and death that punctuate *L'Appartement* disappear altogether. The skull on Lisa's key ring to her car keys, which is shown repeatedly and pointedly in close up throughout the film, is replaced with the letter L. Whereas Max sets fire to Lisa's clothes in his bath, Matt simply pulls down the wall of photos of Lisa pinned above his bed. Whereas Daniel's wife's is being engulfed in flames at the crematorium, in *Wicker Park*, Daniel is shown in wide shot at the cemetery, alone in the background putting flowers on her grave. Finally, the heroine does not burn to death; instead she and Matt are finally reunited.

¹⁶ Chris Berry, 'What's Big about the Big Film?' in *Movie Blockbusters*, ed. Julian Stringer (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 218.

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The story is simplified thereby weakening the underlying threat that pervades the original. The remake also drops all reference to Hitchcock. Yet the chronology and order of the flashbacks and events explaining the story (Backstory 1 and 2) are largely unchanged in the remake, although *Wicker Park* features a flashback on each of the five days on which the story unfolds, thus spreading the disclosure of the events more evenly throughout the film. (See Charts 1 and 2)

Wicker Park may be a case of a poor remake of *L'Appartement*; the adaptation changed too much or too little. The story has been transformed to dampen any threatening aspects. Yet it is marketed as a 'noir thriller'. The film has changed genre. It is no longer a thriller. Instead it is now more a romantic love story. The characters have been reshaped as more clearly good or bad, and less complex. In *Wicker Park*, the hero is on a serious quest to be reunited with his true love, whereas in the original, the hero is a confident, flirtatious, and sentimental character who seems unable to choose between the three women in his life – mirrored by the three engagement rings he cannot choose between at the opening of the film – the event that sets the whole film in motion.

The intent of the film has also undergone a transcultural shift in its adaptation to American social conditions. This shows in plot details. Because the suicide plot detail has been eliminated in the remake, the hero, Matt, cannot be said to really be 'saving' Alex. She correctly, then, sees him as an intruder. She threatens to call the police, and not wake the neighbours as in the French version. The French do not respect their police force, unlike Americans. Such transformations of social mores help translate the film for an American audience. The investment of the audience in the two leads must be recompensed. Matt and Lisa are reunited in the end with an emblematic kiss and the formation of the ideal heterosexual couple, fulfilling another Hollywood trope – the hero finds the right girl. *Wicker Park* embodies here the typical Hollywood film.

However, contradictions do appear in the remake. For instance by making the heroine a dancer rather than an actor, the videorecording scene which features Lisa advising Alex on acting now seems incongruous. None of the characters smoke, unlike the French version. Yet, the same alibi (going out to buy a packet of cigarettes) is used to justify Alex suddenly slipping out of Luke's apartment. *Wicker Park* adopts the plot and narrative structure of the French film almost completely, right down to details (in fact design details) of the mud in Alex's hair for her part in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Like damp stains on a wall, the original film resurfaces in places to haunt the remake and belie its origin as a kind of resistance of the original film to being re-made.

The soundtracks of the two films are very different in their interaction with the audience and are also signs of transcultural flow. *L'Appartement* uses fake sound effects, incongruously, for comic effect, and to reference Hitchcock, such as the sound of birds twittering at the end of the sex scene, or the thunder claps during the night that Max spends in Lisa's apartment being seduced by Alice, as well as during the night of Day Four over separate shots of Max pulling feathers out of the pillow and of Lisa asleep.

The soundtrack to *Wicker Park*, released by the film's production company, Lakeside Entertainment, features a number of fashionable contemporary bands, affiliated with the studio. Like most American films, *Wicker Park* was targeted at a younger audience than *L'Appartement* as demonstrated by the choice of music in both films. *L'Appartement* uses songs sparingly: *Some Kind of Woman*, in the opening credit sequence and twice an old, 1965 Charles Aznavour song, *Le temps*, to underline a moment of happiness. *Wicker Park* features ten songs, which are designed to direct the audience's interpretation of the film, as if the viewer did not have enough information already. The CD of the soundtrack was also marketed in conjunction with the film, as added value. The music video of one of the songs, *Against All Odds*, even includes images from the film. This instance of transcultural flow transforms the film into entertainment different from *L'Appartement*, in which *Wicker Park* is but a part of a greater entertainment package. Audiences are invited to participate in a lifestyle rather than simply partake in a story.

Conclusion

As I have shown, film is a vast system of exchange and mutual dependence and therefore an ideal example of transculture, and no more so than the remake. For French filmmakers in particular, expanding the audience for their films almost always means entering the American market and the world of the remake. As Francis Veber said in a 1999 interview with Rob Blackwelder "Remakes are, unfortunately so far, the compulsory way to reach the real American audience. We know that our films will reach only a very limited audience in the art houses in the subtitled version. So if you really want to have the Anglo-Saxon audience, you have to go through an American movie."¹⁷ But as Smith argues: "Globalisation should not be perceived simply as American culture dominating

¹⁷ Rob Blackwelder, 'Hollywood loves Francis Veber', *Contactmusic.com* at <http://www.contactmusic.com/new/home.nsf/interviewee/veber>. Accessed 08/04/10.

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over and homogenising other cultures but as an interstitial process through which cultures meet and interact.”¹⁸

French cinema has been greatly influenced by Hollywood, *L'Appartement* being one example of transcultural weaving between France and Hollywood, in this case Hitchcock. In turn, *Wicker Park* is an adaptation of *L'Appartement* for an American public. It exemplifies transcultural weaving in the other direction, between France and Hollywood. Both films are instances of different transcultural weavings illustrating Straubhaar's concept of asymmetrical interdependence,¹⁹ to refer to “the variety of possible relationships in which countries find themselves unequal but possessing variable degrees of power and initiative in politics, economics, and culture.” Like Straubhaar²⁰ and Thanouli²¹ after him, I believe “more flexible and complex paradigms are now required” to account for the transcultural in today's increasingly globalised cinema, but the various transcultural patterns will only come to light through a bottom-up detailed analysis, such as I have undertaken here.

¹⁸ Ian R. Smith, ‘Beam Me Up: Transnational Media Flow and the Cultural Politics of the *Star Trek* Remake’, *The Velvet Light Trap*, vol. 61 (2008), pp. 2–13.

¹⁹ Joseph Straubhaar, ‘Beyond Media Imperialism: Asymmetrical Interdependence and Cultural Proximity’, *Cultural Studies in Mass Communications*, vol. 8 (1991), p. 39.

²⁰ Straubhaar, ‘Beyond Media Imperialism’, p. 43.

²¹ Eleftheria Thanouli, ‘Narration in World Cinema: Mapping the Flows of Formal Exchange in the Era of Globalisation’, *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2008) p. 14.